



Ahimsā

Newsletter of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

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Towards Genuine Interfaith Understanding

By SANTIKARO BHIKKHU
Bangkok Post, 24 September 2006

An early exponent of Theravadins opening up to other Buddhist traditions, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu wasn't an activist in the sense of organizing interreligious conferences, but the interest he showed in other religions and his willingness to critique practices he saw as wayward influenced others to do just that.



Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Bangkok, Thailand — Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was one of the most influential figures in Thai Buddhism during the last century. His progressive and reformist character, as well as his profound but extremely straightforward Dharma teachings, made a lasting impact on Theravada Buddhism. This year, we mark the centenary of his birth, and this is the second in a series of “Turning Wheel” articles written in his honor.

One of the lasting influences that Ajahn Buddhadasa has had is the friendliness he displayed towards and the interest he showed in other religions, and his efforts at interreligious cooperation and understanding. Towards the end of his life, a well-known US Catholic author, who had come to Bangkok for a conference, was brought to Suan Mokkh by one of Thailand's Catholic bishops. For many decades, Christians visiting Thailand who wanted to meet a prominent Buddhist and had time to travel outside Bangkok were taken to see Ajahn Buddhadasa at Suan Mokkh. This is because, for a period spanning at least three decades, he was the leading Buddhist voice in the Kingdom speaking out for mutual understanding and cooperation among religions.

So John Bosco Manat Chuabsamai, bishop of Ratchaburi (1986—2003), brought this American to visit. What struck me, the resident foreign monk at Suan Mokkh at that time, was how proud the bishop was. He referred to Ajahn Buddhadasa, who of course was following a different religion, as “ours”. I thought this was unique, and hearten-

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Activities

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship:

- Conducts informal seminars on Buddhism.
- Prepares and distributes free educational material.

Programs

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship sponsors the following programs:

- Instructions in meditation.
- Dhamma study groups.
- Retreats (at IMC-USA).

There are no fees for any of the activities or programs offered by the organization. Seminars are designed to present basic information about Buddhism to the general public — anyone may attend. However, study groups and meditation instructions are open to members only.

Retreats last ten days and are coordinated through IMC-USA in Westminster, MD (410-346-7889). Fees are set by IMC-USA. Advance registration is required.

One-on-one discussions about one's individual practice or about Buddhism in general are also available upon request. These discussions are accorded confidential treatment. There is no fee for one-on-one discussions. ■

Purpose of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship is an educational organization whose purpose is to preserve and promote the original teachings of the Buddha in the West.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship actively encourages an ever-deepening process of commitment among Westerners to live a Buddhist way of life in accordance with the original teachings of the Buddha.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides free educational material to those who want to learn about Buddhism and about how to put the teachings of the Buddha into practice.

The goals of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship are:

1. To provide systematic instruction in the Dhamma, based primarily on Pali sources.
2. To promote practice of the Dhamma in daily life.
3. To provide guidance on matters relating to the Dhamma, its study, and its practice.
4. To encourage the study of the Pali language and literature.
5. To maintain close contact with individuals and groups interested in promoting and supporting the foregoing goals. ■

Dhamma Study Group

A Dhamma study group focusing on the book *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* by Ācariya Anuruddha will be meeting Sunday mornings at 11:00 o'clock beginning on Sunday, January 7, 2007, at the home of Allan Bomhard (940 Rutledge Avenue, Charleston, SC 29403-3206). Call (843) 720-8531 for directions to Allan's home. There is no fee to participate in this group. Those interested in attending this group must have completed *The Buddha and His Teachings* by Nārada Mahāthera. ■

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ing, given how often in our world religion is used to create sectarian conflict. Here was a Catholic bishop who was so proud of our Buddhist monk, whom he clearly took to be the most significant religious figure in the country. Nor was he the only bishop who was a fan of Ajahn Buddhadasa's, which tells us something about the open-mindedness and non-ideological character of Thai culture.

In the 1970s, Ajahn Buddhadasa was the first Buddhist speaker to take part in the annual lecture series at Thailand's main Protestant university. He gave three talks which were published under the title *Christianity and Buddhism*. Later, he gave a series of talks at Suan Mokkh, published as *The Essence of Christianity as Far as Buddhists Should Know*. He emphasized that Buddhists have much to learn from Christian teachings about the practice of *mettā* (loving kindness) — that it's not just about sitting on a cushion, wishing other beings well. He recognized that Christians have a much more developed social-service component than has been the case in the more chaotic and disorganized Buddhist traditions of Asia.

Even as a young monk, he made friends with followers of other religions.

In the early 1930s, while based at a temple in Bangkok, he was good friends with a Vedanta swami. They frequently talked about their respective religions, and what they shared in common. Unfortunately, the swami died in a plane crash in Burma not long after that.

One of Ajahn Buddhadasa's leading students was Haji Prayoon, a Muslim from Bangkok. Prayoon wrote books about religious cooperation and openly spoke of Ajahn Buddhadasa as his teacher. After reading some articles by the Ajahn, he became a regular visitor at Suan Mokkh. Towards the end of the Ajahn's life, there were Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus who considered him to be their teacher. This was quite a unique

situation for Thailand and, perhaps, for most of the world.

Ajahn Buddhadasa was also an early exponent and example of Theravadins opening up to other Buddhist traditions. The Dalai Lama made two visits to Thailand before it became politically impossible for him to do so. Ajahn Buddhadasa met him in Bangkok in 1964. A few years later, the Dalai Lama visited Suan Mokkh for a couple of days. They mainly discussed *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing). Tibetan Buddhists obviously have many practices, but the Dalai Lama felt that they needed to do more work on cultivating *samādhi* (mental concentration) and was interested in *ānāpānasati* for that purpose. At that time, the two men talked about Tibetan monks coming to live at Suan Mokkh, and Ajahn Buddhadasa began to draw up plans to build a Tibetan *gompa* in one corner of his monastery. Unfortunately, due to international politics, this never came about.

Ajahn Buddhadasa translated major parts of the *Lankavatara Sutra*, an important Mahayana text. Later, he translated two classic Zen texts — the *Platform Sutra* of Hui Neng and the *Zen Teachings* of Huang Po. Thus, the first widely known translations of Zen texts in Thailand were carried out by him.

Religion or 'Sāsana'

In interreligious dialogue, it is important to be mindful of our terminology. English terms inevitably carry Christian connotations that may not jibe well with other traditions. The Pali word *sāsana* is commonly used to translate the English word "religion". In Thailand, they've become synonyms simply because "religion" must somehow be translated, though, in root meaning, the two words are not actually equivalent. Concerning *sāsana*, Ajahn Buddhadasa wrote:

"*Sāsana* is not merely teaching [its basic mean-

ing], but refers to activity that brings about survival [or salvation]. On the other hand, ‘religion’ comes from roots meaning both ‘to observe’ and ‘to bind’. Combining these two meanings results in the action in line with the divine teaching that bears the fruit of unifying humanity with heaven, or God. Thus, religion is about action. In Buddhism, the Buddha called this *dharma* and *brahmacariya*, not *sāsana*, because he stressed action. We act for the sake of the same salvation. *Sāsana* is action that leads to salvation. It’s based on the instincts of fear and wanting to survive. The basic activity or struggle is the same, only differing in the level on which it operates. All people are the same people. All religions are the same single religion for this reason.”

Later, he came to speak about universal *sāsana* or universal religion. From his reading of the Koran, the Bible, the Upanishads, Confucianism, Taoism, etc., and meeting with followers of different religions, he came to believe that, at heart, all religions performed the same basic function.

“*Sāsana* is the foundation of life. *Sāsana* comes from the instinct of fear and struggle for survival. When mind advances beyond the physical and mental, this struggle occurs on a higher or more refined level and becomes the various religions and leads to the salvation of life in higher and more wonderful and complete ways.”

Other times, he focused increasingly on what he liked to call the heart of all religions: Unselfishness. He would point out, for example, that Christian teachings and practices were for the sake of unselfishness. If you really take on the belief that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, and take on the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself, it will be impossible to be selfish. He would speak of how all the discipline and effort of Islam is to restrain and overcome selfishness. He would stress that the Buddhist path of unselfishness leads to the realization of selflessness, to seeing that all

phenomena are “not self” and that there is nothing worth clinging to as “me” or “mine”. In these different traditions, he saw the common element of overcoming selfishness.

He expressed his hopes regarding religion in terms of three vows or resolutions. One phrasing of them is: To do everything in my power:

- To help others to realize the heart of their own religion.
- To work for mutual good understanding among the religions.
- To cooperate in dragging the world out from under the power of materialism.

Helping everyone to understand the core of their own tradition is necessary for interreligious exchange and cooperation. One must really know one’s own tradition first in order to explain it in a meaningful, competent, and profound way to others. Only when we can talk from our own deep experiences of our traditions will there be a basis for understanding the religions of others. Of course, now we have a new problem, which is that many people don’t have a tradition at all and are piecing together a hodge-podge of whatever the market offers.

Ajahn Buddhadasa felt that all religions have a common enemy — materialism. Political materialism, hedonistic materialism, and spiritual materialism all perpetuate selfishness. They provide justifications for selfishness. Nationalism in many of its forms is also a justification for self-centeredness. Modern individualism is a justification for self-centeredness. Religion alone, when it understands itself and is true to its primary mission, is the human cultural development best suited to free us from selfishness.

Ajahn Buddhadasa wasn’t an activist in the sense of organizing interreligious conferences; however, people influenced by him did just that. In Thailand, one prominent lay Buddhist strongly influenced by Ajahn Buddhadasa is Sulak Sivaraksa, who founded many NGOs. One of

them is called the Thai Inter-Religious Commission on Development. This was one of various groups that worked to promote interreligious understanding within Thailand. Sulak and some of his students were also involved in the Asian Cultural Forum on Development, which had a strong, interreligious cooperation component. At Suan Mokkh, Christian groups would come for retreats. The Catholic meditation teacher, Father Laurence Freeman, and I led a retreat that brought together Christians and Buddhists, both Asians and Westerners, for seven days.

Ajahn Buddhadasa was not uncritical of the various religions. Just as he conducted an ongoing critique of Buddhism, at times, he would critique other religions, as well. He could be critical of what was sometimes called “Hindus swallowing up Buddhism”. In Suan Mokkh's Spiritual Theatre, there is a picture of a Brahmin priest swallowing a Buddhist monk. On the other hand, he pointed out that the main reason for Buddhism being swallowed up was the inability of Buddhists, and especially Buddhist teachers and leaders, to be clear about what Buddhism is. Buddhism in India became overly involved in ritualism, priestly hierarchies, and *tantra*, none of which are true to the Buddha's original teaching. Because Buddhism wasn't able to stick to the Buddha's original teaching, it became, in many ways, indistinguishable from Hinduism, which made it easy to swallow.

He was critical of attempts by Christians to buy converts. One of his journals noted of Christianity: “If you buy our stupid ones, we'll get your smart ones.” If a religion stoops so low as to use either force or bribes to gain converts, it will lose those intelligent people who see through such manipulation and lose faith in the religion.

He was critical of Buddhism and other traditions when he felt they were behaving superficially, such as giving too much importance to rituals or individual teachers. Even the founder, the Buddha himself, should never be put above the Dharma.

Ajahn Buddhadasa listed seven attitudes based on a misunderstanding of what *sāsana* or religion is truly about:

- The misunderstanding that religion is not necessary in the modern world; that we've somehow advanced beyond the need for religion.
- The understanding of non-religious phenomena as religious or spiritual, such as psychic powers and emotional exuberance.
- The misunderstanding of true religion as not being religious. For example, to claim that freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion is not the basis of liberation (as many modern Buddhists do in trying to justify having their cake and eating it, too).
- The misunderstanding of religion as getting something; for example, financial security, material security, merit, and answers to our prayers.
- The understanding of religion as the enemy of social development.
- The understanding of religion as something that can be used for advantage in competition; e.g., in countries where religious majorities use religion to compete for power and resources.
- The most important misunderstanding is the tendency to see different religions as opposed to our own.

He felt that as long as we remained victims of these attitudes, especially the last, religion would never be powerful enough to do its job — to bring us salvation and peace. The subsequent fighting, competing, and arguing render world peace impossible.

Teachers such as Ajahn Buddhadasa, with their valiant friendliness towards others and untiring efforts to understand the great variety of religious effort in the world, are true peacemakers, to be studied and emulated. May we take him as our inspiration and aspire to such levels of cooperation and understanding for the benefit of all. ■

Christian Evangelism: Whither Decency?

By HARENDRA DE SILVA

The world (or more correctly, the West) appears infatuated with “Muslim fanaticism.” We are told over and over again that Islam preaches fanaticism and that Muslims are allegedly violent and have a blind hatred of non-Muslims. But really, how true are these vacuous claims? They are stories made to justify violent attacks on the Muslim community around the world and take attention away from those who really harbor ill-will against followers of other religions. The media has not given enough attention to the insidious campaign that is taking place this very minute to reduce and wipeout Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and the various other religious traditions that are followed by large sections of humanity.

When I look around, the only people I see trying to wipe out other religions and other peoples’ belief systems are the Christian evangelists and their loud supporters. I have never ever encountered a Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim preacher barging in on my privacy and pushing their holy books in my face, nor have I seen Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims set up organizations purely for the sake of converting others through hook and crook. Despite having a similar religious heritage, we can clearly see that it is the Christian evangelists who are the real religious extremist, and not the Muslims, as loudly claimed by various sections of the media.

Christian evangelism today does not appear to have any respect for cultural and religious diversity. Its aim is to wipe out all non-Christian cultural and religious traditions and replace them with Christianity — more often than not the Western version of it, which has very little in common with the country or society it is targeting. Many tribal societies across the world have lost

their heritage and are in the process of losing them due to the activities of these evangelists. In refusing to see the good in other religions and other ways-of-life, Christian evangelists take on an extremely fundamentalist position that is an affront not only to non-Christians, but to moderate Christians as well.

I am often quite amazed and plainly shocked at the fanatical zeal shown by these Christian evangelists, who wish to convert the entire world to Christianity through whatever means necessary. Entire organizations, or more correctly enterprises, have been set up with the sole purpose of “harvesting souls for God,” and there are many individuals whose job in life is to convert non-Christians to Christianity, and they are paid handsomely to do it. No expense is spared in this task of trying to bring every single person on planet earth to the “light of Jesus Christ,” and no thought whatsoever is given to the religious and cultural diversity that makes this world such a wonderful place.

For these extremists, the sooner all the non-Christian “pagan” and “Satan-inspired” religions perish or are annihilated, the better the world will be; a rather fanatical, naziesque position if there ever was one. By sending evangelist teams around the world and setting up shop in non-Christian majority countries, these evangelist organizations work to destroy the pillars of religious coexistence and tolerance and erect their own pillars of religious supremacy and intolerance in those countries. And Śri Lanka is just another one of their many targets — yet another country “infested with evil pagans” who need to be brought to the “light of Jesus Christ.”

With the kind of mentality explained above, these evangelists have no qualms about using whatever means necessary to gain converts. As they have invaded countries that may not be wealthy, and as is the case in Śri Lanka, they use material inducements to convert the poor and destitute non-

Christians to Christianity. For them, buying souls for their God is not an issue, but the tally of supposedly “saved souls” is. Conversion today has become a big business with big bucks behind it, and, unfortunately, the world we live in appears a battleground for the Christian evangelists, where the competitors are not only the non-Christian religions but rival Christian sects as well.

And to them, all is fair in war. Encouraging new converts to smash statues of the Buddha and Hindu gods and goddesses, burn pictures of the Buddha and Hindu gods and goddesses, burn Dharma books and renounce “pagan” cultural activities are all considered suitable methods of propagating Christianity. Giving potential child converts biscuits fashioned in the shape of a Buddha image and encouraging the kids to eat them while preaching Christianity do not strike the evangelists as insensitive and indecent. And following in the footsteps of the colonials in Śrī Lanka, these cash-rich evangelists offer food, money, and employment to convince poor Śrī Lankans to convert to Christianity, asserting that it is the Christian God that is the harbinger of prosperity and that it is the “Satan-inspired” Buddhist/Hindu/Muslim traditions that continue to keep them in poverty.

It is no wonder that many Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and moderate Christians are simply appalled at the way the evangelists carry out their proselytism and are extremely worried about the impact it will have on religious harmony in this country. It can already be seen that the provocative activities of Christian evangelists have led to the destabilization of peace and harmony among the various religious communities, and, if these evangelists continue with their unethical and iconoclastic methods of proselytism, the situation is bound to get worse. Śrī Lanka could very well do without these people, who are hell-bent on creating a religious imbroglio in this beautiful island.

Christian evangelists in Śrī Lanka and the greater

Asian region need to reconsider their unethical and aggressive methods of proselytism. They need to start according respect to other systems of belief instead of treating them as sworn enemies. The current mentality that drives proselytism, as well as the actual methods of proselytism employed by the evangelists, are going against accepted norms of decency and are creating a negative image of Christianity at large.

By caring naught for religious harmony in Śrī Lanka, Christian evangelists are doing this country a huge disfavor. And, as Śrī Lankans, we cannot sit idly by and watch the religious harmony which we treasure so much disintegrate before our very eyes. We cannot afford to ignore the threat unethical and aggressive evangelism poses to peace and harmony in this country. To do so would mean the victory of fundamentalism and intolerance.

So there is an important question that we must ask ourselves: when will the ideological and iconoclastic war waged by Christian evangelists against the Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims of this country end? Because, as long as the evangelists wage a war to dismantle and/or destroy Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in this country, there can never be true religious harmony. A predator-prey relationship is not conducive to peace and is always marked by stress. This is especially the case for the prey. The predatory desire to see other religions perish and to have Christianity “triumph” over these other religions cannot be condoned and should never be condoned by anyone with a sense of decency. It is a fundamentalist position that is not in tune with our culture and way of life, which gives priority to religious harmony and religious tolerance.

Religious pluralism is what Śrī Lanka is about, and the evangelists want to destroy that. We cannot and must not let them succeed. ■

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Right Mindfulness

Mindfulness

The seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*). *Sati* is the Pali term for a wholesome (*kusala*) state of mind. It is the mind-state that is inseparably linked with wholesomeness, not mixed up with or touched by anything harmful or unwholesome. When we perform wholesome actions, *sati* is present. It is present when we are generous and present when we are kind. It is present when we maintain a meditation center, when we observe the five or eight precepts, and when we follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

“All wholesome states of mind”, said the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, “are *sati*.” All.

Acts of generosity performed without expectation are acts being performed with *sati*. When we clean the floor in the meditation hall without any expectations, we are cleaning with *sati*. And, when we perform any virtuous deed without expectations, we are performing it with *sati*. *Sati* is observing the five or eight precepts without expectations, and it is following the Noble Eightfold Path without expectations.

Actions performed with expectations are not being performed with *sati*. Acts of generosity in which there is an expectation of future rebirth in a higher plane, of recognition, of praise, of fame, or of obtaining anything at all in return are not completely wholesome acts of generosity and thus are not being performed with *sati*. In general, any act of generosity is a wholesome act, but, at the point where expectations are present, there is no *sati*. In the same way, if we are observing the precepts with the expectation of gaining rebirth in a higher plane or of gaining favorable future results, our state of mind has not yet reached the level of *sati*; our minds are mixed

up with ignorance at that point. Even though making the effort to observe the precepts is a beneficial state of mind, there is no *sati* at the point where expectations are present.

The concept of a wholesome state of mind existed before the Buddha; people kept precepts, and they practiced generosity, kindness, and compassion. There already existed a tradition in ancient India of developing a wholesome state of mind, and this mind-state was called *sati*. People practiced *sati* in an effort to attain favorable results, such as rebirth in a favorable place where they could live in peace for all eternity. They did not practice *sati* to achieve anything beyond these types of results.

Prince Siddhattha realized that practicing *sati* in this way only led to decay and death, only perpetuated endless suffering in *samsāra*, and set out to find a more satisfactory form of liberation. Eventually, Siddhattha discovered that overcoming decay and death required turning the body, activities performed with the body and the mind, and all the thoughts of the mind towards the wholesome and skillful. Training his body and mind in this way, Siddhattha attained enlightenment and became the Buddha, subsequently teaching liberating truths to all who wanted to listen. As a result of these teachings, the goal of practicing *sati* changed from attaining conditioned results that are subject to decay and death, to one of going beyond decay and death and attaining the unconditioned — *nibbāna*. The Buddha called this way the noble, *ariyan sati*, *sammā-sati*.

Through the practice of *sati*, we break free from *samsāra*. *Sati* means that we have no expectations whatsoever. There is only the thought that our existence in *samsāra* is *dukkha* and that there is decay and death here. Just to get beyond that, to overcome that, is the only thought in our minds. That is *sati*. Just that one thought in mind, that all we are looking for is to go beyond *samsāra*, to go beyond decay and death.

Attention

Paying attention, *manasikāra*, is similar to *sati*; a mindful awareness is present. Attention, however, is only the faculty of our minds to observe phenomena. It is nothing more than this faculty of observance. Through paying attention, we turn our minds towards objects of experience.

By using our faculty of attention, we turn our minds towards objects of experience. Paying attention is nothing more than turning our minds towards a variety of different objects. It is a neutral faculty that supports the performance of wholesome actions, neutral actions, and unwholesome actions. This is the nature of beings. *Manasikāra* sometimes turns towards wholesomeness and sometimes towards unwholesomeness.

When a thief breaks into a house, he uses his attention (*manasikāra*). He is very aware of walking, speaking, and all movements. If a thief makes a mistake and gets caught, we say: “Hey, you have no *sati*.” But it is incorrect to say this, because actions performed with *sari* are free from expectations, and, of course, a thief expects to steal something. Therefore, this form of attention is not *sati*. Having no expectations whatsoever, even when performing good actions, is the cause for attaining *nibbāna*.

When people who are new to meditation forget something, we also say: “Hey, you have no *sati*.” We say this in order to help them develop their mindfulness, but, after a while, we have to explain to them what *sati* is and what just paying attention (*manasikāra*) is. But to help meditators who are just starting to develop a practice, we say: “You have no *sati*.”

Right now, I am doing many different things, and I place my eyeglasses on the table. After our discussion, I will get up and go somewhere. Then, there is a chance I will forget that I placed my

eyeglasses on the table. Some people may say: “Pemasiri has no *sati*. That teacher has no mindfulness.” But these people are wrong to say that, because my forgetfulness is not a lapse of *sati*. It is true that I may be paying little attention to where I placed my eyeglasses, but I am still carrying on with my *sati*, my wholesome state of mind. That is all that is happening. Many people think that forgetfulness is a lapse of *sati*. But we cannot say that.

Even while practicing *sati* correctly, a very good meditator sometimes forgets things — he can have a bath and forget his bar of soap or his toothbrush, because he is not turning his attention, his *manasikāra*, towards the bar of soap or towards the toothbrush. Instead, at that particular moment in time, the meditator is turning his attention towards some other object of experience, such as his mind. The meditator is simply not turning his faculty of attention towards the bar of soap or the toothbrush and, as a result, forgets them.

Paying attention (*manasikāra*) is merely the faculty of being aware of an object of experience, any material or immaterial object of experience. It is nothing more than this. Through our faculty of attention, we shift our minds from one object of experience to another object of experience; our attention continually changes from one object to another and then to another. It is just the faculty of being attentive to what is happening. If we direct our attention towards remembering everything that happens, we shall remember everything that happens. Paying attention (*manasikāra*) is purely the turning of the mind towards an object of experience. We connect our minds with whatever object of experience we direct our attention towards. These objects of experience can be wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral. *Manasikāra* is not necessarily connected to a wholesome state of mind, while *sati* is.

Sati is a wholesome state of mind, a wholesome conscious state of mind, which is only associated

with beneficial experience and is never associated with harmful experience. Entirely mindful of their behavior, those who maintain *sati* never let their minds fall away from a wholesome state. They are always directing their attention towards wholesome objects of experience. If the man who forgets the bar of soap is a good meditator and is practicing *sati* correctly, he is always turning his attention towards beneficial objects. He forgets the bar of soap simply because he does not turn his attention towards the bar of soap. Forgetting the bar of soap does not mean that his mind is falling away from a wholesome state of being, from *sati*. It only means there was no attention paid to that particular object of experience, the bar of soap — nothing more.

It is a major misunderstanding to think or to teach that these two separate concepts — mindfulness (*sati*) and paying attention to objects of experience (*manasikāra*) — are the same. *Sati* is different from *manasikāra*; a wholesome state of mind is not the same as simply paying attention to something.

The Buddha spoke about *manasikāra* and *sati* as two separate topics. *Manasikāra* is quite different from *sati*. *Manasikāra* simply supports all of our states and actions. The purpose of the faculty of attention (*manasikāra*) is to open and close the mind-door to the factors of the mind — that is all. It is just there to perform that duty — to open and close the mind-door. *Manasikāra* helps us to perform all of our actions, whether they are beneficial, neutral, or harmful. When *manasikāra* helps us to perform harmful actions, it is connecting to ignorance (*avijjā*). *Sati*, on the other hand, never connects with ignorance and only supports the performance of wholesome actions. *Sati* only connects with wisdom (*paññā*). Nothing connects with *sati* except wisdom — absolutely nothing. That is what sets *sati* apart from *manasikāra*.

Admittedly, when we diligently train in paying attention to the objects of our experience, we

develop a heightened level of mindful attention that functions much like *sati*. Many years ago, I trained in this *manasikāra* aspect of the teachings and now, if I decide, from this moment on, that I am going to pay good attention to every action I perform, then every action I perform will be with an attentive state of mind. All of my physical actions — even the blinking of my eyes — will be experienced with undivided attention, and, afterwards, I shall be able to recall most of these actions. But this is not *sati* inasmuch as there is no development of wisdom, no progress.

Development requires turning our attention away from unwholesome objects and towards wholesome ones. When we do this, our attention is called *yoniso-manasikāra*. And because *sati* is always part of the state of mind associated with wholesomeness, *yoniso-manasikāra* supports the development of *sati*. Paying attention comes easily and automatically, but paying attention in a completely wholesome way, with *yoniso-manasikāra*, does not come automatically; it takes effort and development.

Clear Comprehension

When the Buddha described *sati*, he generally included the term *sampajañña* as part of the description. *Sampajañña* means clearly seeing the characteristics of existence. With *sampajañña*, we are conscious of an experience as it arises, and we are conscious of it as it passes away. *Sampajañña* is clear comprehension. There is a clarity of consciousness.

When we combine *sati* with *sampajañña*, our wholesome state of mind and our clarity of consciousness are well developed; we never allow a mind-state to arise that is divorced from wholesomeness. We are fully aware of our actions and perform our actions with wisdom. At this well-developed level of clarity, all of our physical actions, our feelings, and our mental states are wholesome. Every act and experience that takes

place in our mental process is made into something wholesome and beneficial. When we work with *sati-sampajañña*, we work with right understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*) and right thought (*sammā saṅkappa*). We differentiate mentality from materiality, and we work with wisdom (*paññā*).

Each morning, the sun chases away the darkness of the night. We see objects that we did not see during the night, and there is no doubt in our minds about the identity of these objects. There is no confusion. When the rays of the morning sun strike a pure dewdrop, the pure dewdrop gives a wonderful reflection of the morning sun. The light of the sun shines in the pure dewdrop. In this example, the sun may be likened to *nibbāna*, darkness to ignorance (*avijjā*), the pure dewdrop to the mind in *sati*, and seeing clearly to *sampajañña*.

Purity combined with seeing clearly is *sati-sampajañña*. The pure, clear mind of *sati-sampajañña* is in the light of *nibbāna*. It is a bright state of mind. And, even though this state of mind is only a reflection of *nibbāna* and has not yet truly attained *nibbāna*, it shines just like *nibbāna* inasmuch as it is not mixed up with ignorance (*avijjā*) of any kind. Since it is a state full of wisdom (*paññā*), there is no confusion regarding experiences. Any object, anything whatsoever, that comes into our field of experience is known without confusion (*moha*). When we are in the

light of *nibbāna*, in *sati-sampajañña*, we know the true nature of existence. The darkness of our ignorance is chased away, and we see objects with clarity and understanding.

Another dewdrop may be muddy. Not reflecting the morning sun, it may be likened to a mind mixed up with ignorance. With no *sati-sampajañña*, that is, no wholesome state of mind and no clarity of consciousness, the muddy dewdrop never shines like *nibbāna* — never.

When we train in *sati-sampajañña*, we act skillfully at all times in our lives and easily make our way. We consider our meditation practice and our routine daily lives as one and the same — united. With our meditation practice woven into every part of our lives, we can be involved in any activity without conflict, because we are always seeing clearly and are always free from expectations. When we have *sati-sampajañña*, we are like the pure dewdrop, and *nibbāna* shines.

Two kinds of people have *sati-sampajañña*: *Arahats* and meditators who mindfully perform all of their actions without expectations. There is no clinging or aversion, only seeing clearly. To be free of suffering, we must develop our *sati-sampajañña*. ■

Condensed and adapted from *Walking the Tightrope: Talks on Meditative Development with Pemasiri Thera*, Chapter 17, Right Mindfulness. Translated by David Young. ©2005 by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Nibbāna

There is an important teaching of the Buddha that often gives rise to serious misunderstanding. It is the teaching of *Nibbāna*, or the extinction of suffering. This third Noble Truth points out that, through the cessation of all selfish craving and all ignorance, of necessity all suffering comes to an end, to extinction, and no new rebirth will take

place. For, if the seed is destroyed, it can never sprout again. If the selfish craving that clutches convulsively at life is destroyed, then, after death, there can never again take place a fresh shooting up, a continuation of this process of existence, a so-called “rebirth”. Where there is no birth, there can be no death. Where there is no arising, there can be no passing away. Where no life exists, no suffering (*dukkha*) can exist. Now, because with the extinction of all selfish craving, all its

concurrent phenomena, such as conceit, self-seeking, greed, hatred, anger, and cruelty, come to an end, this freedom from selfish craving signifies the highest state of selflessness, wisdom, and holiness.

There is, Monks, that sphere wherein there is neither earth nor water, nor fire, nor air; wherein there is neither the sphere of infinite space, nor that of infinite consciousness, nor that of nothingness, nor that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; wherein there is neither this world nor a world beyond, nor moon and sun. There, Monks, I declare is no coming, no going, no stopping, no passing away, no arising. It is not established, it does not continue on, it has no object. Thus, indeed, is the end of suffering.

There is, Monks, an unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned state. If, Monks, there were not this unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned, an escape from the born, originated, made, and conditioned would not be possible. Inasmuch as there is an unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned state, an escape from the born, originated, made, and conditioned is possible.

Now, it is sometimes erroneously believed that annihilation of the self, that is, annihilation of a real being, takes place since, after the death of a Holy One, an *Arahant*, this psychophysical life-process no longer continues, and it is therefore maintained that the goal of Buddhism is simply annihilation. Against such a misleading statement, one must enter an emphatic denial. How is it ever possible to speak of the annihilation of a self, or soul, or ego, where no such thing exists? As we have seen, in reality there is no such thing as an ego-entity, or soul, and, therefore, no “transmigration” of such a thing to a new mother’s womb.

That bodily process beginning anew in the mother’s womb is in no way a continuation of the former bodily process but merely a result, or effect, caused by selfish craving and clinging to life of the so-called “dying individual”.

Here, once again, it may be expressly emphasized that, without a clear perception of the phenomenality or egolessness of all existence, it is impossible to obtain a real understanding of the Buddha’s teaching, especially that of rebirth and *Nibbāna*. ■

Living an Enlightened Life

Everything that arises, disappears; whatever is born, dies. Nothing escapes the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). It is important for us to directly and experientially realize that there is never a point in time when something “exists” and is not in the process of becoming something other than it was just a moment before. All suffering comes from attachment — trying to hold on to that which is perpetually changing —, and all attachment

comes from delusion (*moha*). We need to learn to live in the clarity and space of non-attachment, neither grasping nor pushing anything away. The key is to just be present with what arises from moment to moment without holding or resisting. At the same time, it is essential not to fall into the trap of denying the relative existence of the five aggregates and the world of experience they present.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is the willingness to play in the field of dreams even though you are awake. Approach life with joy, enthusiasm, love, and an open heart. Take delight in the manifestations of

❖ Ahimsā, Newsletter of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship ❖

life: it is all a play of consciousness, and it is really all play. If something appears serious or burdensome — even death —, then we are lost in delusion. The “field of dreams” is this world of the senses with all its myriad forms. Being awake is the direct knowing that there is no one who suffers, no one who is born, and no one who dies. It is the five aggregates that are born and die. Who we are has never been born and never dies.

In actuality, there is no one who is expressing compassion to anyone else. It is all part of the play. The world is our mirror. There is only consciousness (*viññāṇa*) rising and falling along with its objects; it is all selfless (*anattā*). Whatever we see as being real is a projection of our own mind. It is where our mind is stuck or identified with the illusion.

Nothing exists the way it appears to exist — existence and non-existence are both concepts. Not holding on to anything anywhere at any time is freedom beyond measure.

We must die to each moment and allow life to express itself through us. Our lives may not turn out the way in which the ego has imagined, but when we surrender to the truth of what is, we will find freedom beyond measure as surely as the river finds its way to the sea. When we move beyond the dualistic world, there is a rebirth into the deathless. We finally come home to a place that we have really never left. ■

Adapted from Matthew Flickstein’s book *Swallowing the River Ganges: A Practice Guide to the Path of Purification*, Chapter 9. ©2001 by Wisdom Publications, Boston, MA.



Pagoda and meditation hall, IMC-USA, Westminister, MD (photograph taken by Allan R. Bomhard, August 2002)

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